DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 159 724 CS 204 398

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TITLE Did Anybody Know His Name? Coverage of Steven Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa by the New York "Times" and the Washington "Post," 1969-1977.
PUB DATE Aug 78
NOTE 28p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism (61st, Seattle, Washington, August 13-16, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Black Leadership; Black Organizations; Communication Problems; *Content Analysis, Foreign Countries; *Information Dissemination; Information Sources; Journalism; *Newspapers; *News Reporting; News Writing; Political Issues; *Press Opinion
IDENTIFIERS *Biko (Steven); *South Africa

ABSTRACT

The way in which United States journalists covered the views of the South African black leader Steven Biko both before his death in prison in 1977 and after it is examined in this paper. Press coverage of Biko's death is first described; it is noted that journalists wrote of his great stature and significance and of his "moderate and responsible" views. Next, an analysis is presented of the coverage by the New York "Times" and the Washington "Post" between 1969 and 1977 of such topics as South Africa, Biko, the South African black consciousness movement, other black leaders in South Africa, and black consciousness organizations founded by Biko. It is concluded that the coverage did not provide readers with adequate understanding of Biko, his organizations, or his life, nor did it explain later assertions regarding his great stature and significance and his "moderate and responsible" views. Reporters' difficulties in reporting foreign events adequately, particularly when--as was the case with South Africa--they are permitted very limited access to a country are then discussed in interviews with "Times" and "Post" reporters. Finally, it is suggested that reporters should have taken advantage of the expertise of United States schclars of South African black politics. (GW)

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DID ANYBODY KNOW HIS NAME?

Coverage of Steven Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa by the New York Times and the Washington Post 1969 - 1977

by

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Presented to the Mass Communications and Society Division, Association for Education in Journalism Annual Convention, Seattle, Washington August 1978

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On September 12, 1977, Steven Biko, a 30-year-old black South African, died in Pretoria Central Prison. In their reports of his death, American journalists, particularly those on the New York Times and Washington Post, asserted that Biko, a founder of the black consciousness movement in South Africa, was either the most important or one of the most important black leaders in South Africa and was a "moderate and responsible" voice for evolutionary change. So important was he that his death apparently contributed to the U.S. decision to participate in a unanimous U.N. Security Council vote to place an arms embargo on South Africa.

Study of the Times and Post from 1969 through 1977 showed that, in spite of their assertions of his importance, journalists on these papers had scarcely covered Biko and the political organizations of the black consciousness movement at all until his death. Nor did they explain what they meant by describing Biko as "moderate and responsible."

After reviewing these findings, Anthony Lewis of the Times and Jim Hoagland of the Post, who had covered South Africa for several years, presented their difficulties in covering Biko and in making use of the expertise of American scholars of black politics in South Africa.

The paper discusses their difficulties and concludes with troubling speculations about their unexplained references to Biko as "moderate and responsible."

Presented to the Mass Communications and Society Division, Association for Education in Journalism Annual Convention, Seattle, Washington
August 1978

Make a note of the name Steven Biko and remember it well. One way or another it will be writ large in the South Africa of tomorrow. He is not the first potential prime minister to be detained without trial in this country — but I hope they treat him well while he is inside, because he has a remarkable memory. And so have his friends.

Donald Woods, editor, East London Daily Dispatch
September 1976

To equate Mr. Biko with the late President Kennedy...and with Senator Robert Kennedy and even Martin Luther King — I must say I was never so astounded in my life....If you asked any black man on the street who Biko was before he died, he wouldn't have been able to tell you. Now all of a sudden, he's the biggest black leader in South Africa.

John Vorster, prime minister of South Africa
September 1977

In a review of Southern Africa in Crisis (edited by Gwendolen M. Carter and Patrick O'Meara), Kenneth Grundy observed:

> To many of us, it seems an unending and usually losing battle to try to keep abreast of events around the world. Newspapers are a cure almost as depressing as the disease. They lack perspective and seldom help us to interpret events.[1]

Criticism that American press coverage of foreign affairs is reactive, often overreactive, to events that are rarely placed in perspective is almost tediously familiar. Grundy's comments echo Bernard Cohen's conclusions in his pioneering analysis of the press and foreign policy published in 1963. Cohen noted that press coverage of foreign affairs is anchored

> in the immediate present, in the wake of those things that can be observed to have happened. The foreign affairs correspondents, in terms of their own modus operandi, have only a limited freedom to move in various directions, asking more anticipatory or developmental questions about political issues or possibilities, much as a boat at anchor can maneuver in a very circumscribed arc.

Cohen added

> that the biggest play is likely to be given to the dramatic, the controversial, the contentious, the personal element; and that this pattern of story choice has the effect of muffling other stories, on a day-to-day basis and also over extended periods of time....that in hopping from issue to issue, from crisis to crisis, the correspondent deals in political discontinuities.[2]

Limited time, space, money, and reader interest affect reporters' priorities, which, Cohen argued, reflect "the problems involved in assimilating foreign affairs to the standards of a mass market,"[3] and clearly inhibit more complete, continuous, and interpretative coverage of foreign affairs. No doubt reporters have enough difficulty merely signalizing events abroad without attempting what Walter Lippmann described as the function of truth: "to bring to light the hidden facts, to set them in relation with each other, and make a picture of

reality on which men can act."[4] Nevertheless, the news media unavoidably make pictures of reality on which men may have to act. Indeed, Cohen found that not only do members of the public attentive to foreign affairs rely on the news media for information but that the foreign policy maker -- in the White House, the State Department, and Congress -- "typically takes more out of the press than any of them readily admits to, or may even be aware of."[5] Even though officials expressed a cynical, disdainful attitude toward the press, Cohen noted that they turned to the press for basic factual information, for analysis and evaluation of developments and proposals, for a measure of the comparative importance of events, and for a measure of public opinion.

PRESS COVERAGE OF STEVEN BIKO'S DEATH

On September 12, 1977, Steven Biko, a 30-year-old black South African, died in Pretoria Central Prison from injuries received during his detention since August 18 under the Terrorism Act. His death seemed the catalyst that provoked the United States to punitive response, the catalyst in a series of events starting with riots in Soweto, a black ghetto outside Johannesburg, in June 1976 and continuing after Biko's death and the protests it caused with the South African government's arresting and banning approximately 60 persons, 18 organizations, and two black newspapers in October 1977. In November 1977, the United States recalled the U.S. naval attache and commercial officer from South Africa and participated in a unanimous U.N. Security Council vote to impose a mandatory arms embargo on South Africa.

This paper does not investigate whether the prominent play given Biko's death by American news media, particularly the New York Times and the Washington Post, had any effect on U.S. policy. The paper's main question is: Had the press reported enough information and analysis of Biko from his emergence as a student leader in 1969 to his death in 1977 to enable readers to understand and evaluate

Biko's stature and significance in South Africa and that of the South African Students' Organization (SASO) and Black People's Convention (BPC), the political organizations he helped found?

In their reports of Biko's death, reporters and editorial writers on a sample of major American newspapers, news magazines and wire services certainly asserted Biko's stature and significance.[6] To some Biko was one of the country's most important black leaders, to others he was the most important; to some he was one of the most influential among young urban blacks, to others he was the most influential young black leader. The distinctions are not necessarily trivial. In the days immediately after his death, the New York Times and Washington Post presented Biko in this way:

In the Times' first report, on page three on September 14, John F. Burns, the paper's correspondent in South Africa, referred to Biko as "the country's most influential black leader." The Times commented on September 15 that Biko "was perhaps the most impressive and influential leader among younger black South Africans, the major figure in his country's growing 'black consciousness' movement" and a "moderate and responsible voice for evolutionary change." In the same issue, Times columnist Anthony Lewis described Biko as "one of the country's most respected black leaders," as a "tall, strong, magnetic figure who had the special confidence of the increasingly angry students and other young blacks." Lewis quoted Sen. Dick Clark (D.-Iowa), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee on Africa, who had met Biko: "He was a very calm, intelligent, moderate sort of person -- someone that you felt could have brought the sides together."

In a Times story on September 16, comments from The World, South Africa's largest black newspaper, were summarized: Biko was "'something special,' whose personality and intelligence exerted a 'disproportionate influence' on South Africans of all races, and on foreign diplomats and politicians who visited him."

On September 17 in the Times, Seymour Topping reported Secretary of State Cyrus Vance's evaluation of Biko as "perhaps the most important young black leader" in South Africa.

On the front page of the Washington Post on September 14, staff writer Jay Ross said Biko was "one of the leading figures of black protest in South Africa," and was "internationally known as a moderate black voice for change but was outspoken in his protest against South Africa's racial segregation laws." Ross continued:

> As founder of the South African Students' Organization, Biko had urged blacks to stand up and assert their own destiny.... Biko was also founder of the Black People's Convention, which, like the students organization, attempted to raise black consciousness by establishing self-help projects such as medical clinics and cottage industries.

On September 15 the Post said in an editorial that Biko

> was a founder of the South African Students' Organization, which represents perhaps the country's most important and volatile political interest group, and a leader of the "black consciousness" movement, which undertakes to build pride and a sense of community among its constituency. A man with an international reputation, he had personal qualities that had established him as one of the likeliest leaders for the government to deal with if it wished to channel rising black rage away from despair and violence.

Although these American journalists were not unanimous in their evaluation of Biko's stature and significance -- and even in "straight" news stories it is their unattributed evaluation --, all agreed that his significance derived from his leadership of the black consciousness movement in South Africa, from his part in founding BPC and SASO, which the Post considered perhaps the country's most important and volatile political interest group. The journalists and the U.S. officials they quoted agreed that Biko was a "moderate." And however they differed in their assessment of his stature and significance, all agreed that Biko was very important.

THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Although South African Prime Minister John Vorster professed astonishment at the prominence claimed for Biko, this paper does not dispute the stature accorded Biko by American journalists and officials. Rather it asks: If Biko and his movement were so important and influential that his death commanded prominent play in major American newspapers and apparently contributed to U.S. action against South Africa, were Americans informed about Biko and his movement before his death, from the founding of SASO in 1969? Some journalists may insist that Biko's death was prominently played as much for its appalling manner as for his importance as a leader. Yet, as many reporters noted, Biko was the 20th black to die in police detention in South Africa in 18 months. None of the other 19 deaths received comparable press coverage.

This study concentrates on the New York Times and Washington Post because they are generally considered to provide the most comprehensive coverage of foreign affairs by U.S. daily newspapers. Although Cohen noted, for example, that foreign policy officials read "an amalgam of the eastern metropolitan newspapers of higher quality and better coverage," he found that "the single most important newspaper" was the Times. He argued, however, that if "one hypothesizes that the order in which newspapers are read has some impact on the relative attention paid to each," then the Post is almost as important as the Times. For many foreign policy specialists, "the Post is the doorstep newspaper, and it is read over the breakfast table," said Cohen. "They will then pick up the Times on the way to the office, or it will be on their desks when they arrive."[7]

For a record of their coverage of Biko, SASO, BPC, and the black consciousness movement, The New York Times Index and the index to the Post, newspaper index published by Bell & Howell Co., which begins only in 1972, were consulted. The following analysis, then, is only as thorough and reliable as the indexes[8] and as the researcher's care and ingenuity in interpreting them. Relevant stories

could have been missed, although an attempt was made through telephone interviews and correspondence with some of the journalists involved to identify stories that may have been missed.

Certainly much was missing in assertions of Biko's influence and importance. Biko's obituaries in the American press left these questions substantially unanswered: When did Biko achieve his influence and importance? What precisely was meant by describing him as a "moderate"? How did he propose to bring about change in South Africa? What role did he want the United States to play in bringing about change? What sort of society did he envision for South Africa? Perhaps the Times and Post had answered them before Biko's death.

COVERAGE OF BIKO, SASO, AND BPC FROM 1969 THROUGH 1977

Background

The New York Times Index shows that coverage of South Africa was particularly extensive in the early 1960s, a period of militant black protest directed mainly by the African National Congress (ANC) under Nelson Mandela and the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) under Robert Sobukwe, which organized the protests that led to the police's shooting of unarmed demonstrators at Sharpeville in March 1960. The South African government proclaimed a state of emergency, declared the ANC and PAC unlawful organizations, and detained hundreds of blacks and whites. A period of sabotage and terrorism followed, ending with the arrest of the leaders in 1963 and their sentence to life imprisonment in the Rivonia trial of 1964.

The government not only virtually eliminated black political activity in 1964, but in 1966 expelled Times correspondent Joseph Lelyveld, allowing no permanent, and only a few visiting, Times correspondents until May 1976 when it allowed John Burns to be stationed in South Africa as the Times permanent correspondent. At the same time, U.S. involvement in Vietnam and the protest it provoked came to preoccupy the American press and public and coverage of South Africa diminished.

It increased again after Vietnam and Watergate, particularly after the unexpectedly early achievement of independence by Mozambique and Angola in 1975 put pressure for change on the South African and Rhodesian governments and forced Secretary of State Henry Kissinger to address the foreign policy issues southern Africa raised for the United States.

Meanwhile, black political activity had revived in South Africa, mainly among black university students, who formed SASO in 1969. Determined to develop black pride and consciousness, SASO broke formally from the white-dominated National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) and from all whites in the Liberal and Progressive parties who had borne the burden of opposition to apartheid since 1964. BPC, "sometimes spoken of as the adult reflection of SASO but with a wider, more specifically political thrust,"[9] was formed soon after SASO.

Then, beginning in 1973, black workers organized strikes throughout South Africa for higher wages, focussing international attention on the plight of black labor and provoking American press coverage and commentary on the role of U.S. firms and investment in South Africa. At the same time, the government's Bantustan policy of separate territorial development for nine ethnic or tribal groups had provided the more aggressive homeland leaders with an official platform to express the demands and grievances of both homeland and urban blacks. The most outspoken leader was Gatsha Buthelezi, chief of Kwa-Zulu, the fragmented territory of the Zulus, who began to receive considerable attention in the American press from 1970 onward.

In 1973 the South African government detained SASO leaders for the first time, restricting Steven Biko to Kingwilliamstown, his home in the eastern Cape. Nine SASO leaders came to trial in mid 1975, charged under the Terrorism Act mainly with conspiracy to bring about violent, revolutionary change in South Africa. Biko appeared as a defense witness, articulating exhaustively the black consciousness philosophy and attacking the apartheid system.[10] After a 17-month trial, the judge declared in December 1976 that SASO and BPC were not revolutionary organizations, and found the SASO leaders not guilty of the main charge but guilty of conspiracy to endanger law and order. In June 1976, during the trial, student riots broke out in Soweto, the black township outside Johannesburg, and again in June 1977, and the Times covered South Africa as intensively as it had in the early 1960s. In August 1977 the police arrested Biko on charges of distributing subversive literature, and on September 13, 1977, Minister of Police Jimmy Kruger reported that Biko had died in Pretoria Central Prison after a hunger strike.

Biko's death, the protest in South Africa and abroad that followed, the revelation in the inquest that he had died from police beating, and the escape from South Africa of Donald Woods, editor of the East London Daily Dispatch, who

had been banned for his part in protests against his friend Biko's death, kept Biko's name in the news for the next two months.

Biko, SASO, BPC, and the New York Times

Between the founding of SASO in 1969 and Biko's death in 1977, the New York Times, it seems, carried only one extended article on Biko. On September 19, 1976, John F. Burns reported that while Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was meeting the previous day with a group of non-white leaders, other "more radical" leaders vigorously opposed the U.S. decision to deal directly with Prime Minister John Vorster and warned that future American relations with a black-ruled South Africa might be jeopardized by the Kissinger-Vorster talks, which "black radicals" regarded as reinforcing the position of the white government.

Burns followed with an interview of Biko, then characterized as a radical not a moderate. What future did Biko contemplate for South Africa? Burns reported that Biko "favored a policy of black socialism, severe restraints on private enterprise and sharply cutting, if not eliminating, foreign investment." What should the United States do to bring about this future? Burns reported Biko as saying that the United States should:

* issue an ultimatum to South Africa to abandon apartheid, or face a complete trade, sports and cultural boycott;

* support moves to oust South Africa from the U.N. and its agencies;

* ban any further U.S. investment in South Africa and force companies operating there to leave;

* support more explicitly, morally and financially, the liberation struggle in South Africa.

Biko condemned the leaders talking with Kissinger, the most prominent being Gatsha Buthelezi, as persons cooperating with the South African government. The

true voice of black South Africans, said Biko, were the more radical leaders in jail, those working outside South Africa's governmental structure.

When the Times wrote of Biko after his death as "a moderate and responsible voice for evolutionary change," it did not refer to Biko's 1976 proposals. Did the Times regard these proposals as "radical" or "moderate"? The seemingly contradictory terms were not defined or explained. In the Times of September 21, 1975, for example, Anthony Lewis had written of Buthelezi as "a classic moderate, in the mold of Dr. King, who wants to live with the whites." In the absence of any presentation in Biko's obituaries of his goals and proposals for achieving them, these "moderate," King-like men seem politically interchangeable. Perhaps Biko had changed his views between 1976 and his death or Times reporters had changed their criteria for distinguishing between "radical" and "moderate."

Whether the U.S. government, which sent an impressive delegation to Biko's funeral, agreed with his 1976 views for evolutionary change, the Times did not report. In Lagos, Nigeria, on August 25, 1977, three weeks before Biko's death, Ambassador Andrew Young had opposed the "radical demands for opposing mandatory total economic sanctions against South Africa...and the cessation of all investment and loans there."[11] These "radical" demands, with which Biko agreed in 1976, were also opposed by Buthelezi. What then explained Biko's transformation in the Times from a "radical" in September 1976 to a "moderate" just a year later? Biko's obituaries in the Times conveyed the impression that the reasonable, moderate Biko wanted a nonracial South Africa in which blacks and whites could live together. What, then, of his discussion with Burns in September 1976 of a "black-ruled South Africa," of a "policy of black socialism"? The positions are not necessarily contradictory, but in all the attention paid in the Times to Biko after his death, surely his politics required clearer explication. Or was Biko right when he implied in 1976 that the "true voice of black South Africans" was being ignored?

1-

In its almost annual series between 1969 and 1977 on South Africa in general and black politics in particular, the Times had reported the black consciousness movement. But in its reporting and analysis of black political leaders, the Times had focussed mainly on Chief Gatsha Buthelezi. In a July 1970 series, Marvine Howe reported that the policy of racial separation "is stirring among blacks a new consciousness of their identity." Although the Nationalist government had "successfully smashed all militant political organizations," Howe said, "the blacks are solidifying their ranks or building non-political organizations" such as the African Teachers Association and the Urban Bantu Council of Johannesburg. However, Howe reported, Buthelezi had "injected himself as a potential leader of the black majority of more than 13 million." Howe did not mention Biko.

The next month in the Times, on August 21, 1970, a report described how NUSAS was reassessing its role after blacks had withdrawn to form SASO in July 1970. The report concerned NUSAS not SASO. On July 13, 1971, the Times noted "the emergence of articulate and assertive spokesmen for South Africa's 15 million blacks," referring to an "all-black academic group, the South African Students' Organization" which intended to limit its cooperation with multiracial organizations to "necessary and strategic" cases. A one paragraph story on July 9, 1972, reported that SASO had called for black nursery rhymes.

In a series in May 1973, Charles Mohr reported that the black masses "are no longer mute or totally powerless." Buthelezi and other homeland leaders, said Mohr, "have, in an almost violent tone, begun to attack the whole policy of separate development, which they were expected to help carry out." The next year, on November 30, Mohr wrote that "militant black leadership has been eradicated....lawful, nonviolent, evolutionary black political action has been enfeebled, and whites are shielded from the necessity of confronting, much less dealing with, the black problem." Perhaps Mohr was referring to SASO leaders, among them Biko, whom the government had detained for the first time in 1973, but Biko does not seem to appear in the Times until 1976. If the SASO leaders

had been eradicated by November 1974, how was Biko able to become perhaps the most influential leader of younger blacks? At what point did his influence take hold? And how?

During a visit to South Africa, Anthony Lewis wrote on June 12, 1975, that Buthelezi was "the most articulate spokesman for African yearnings in this country," that he was a moderate man -- "Some younger Africans think, indeed, that he is too moderate." On September 21, Lewis noted that "black student leaders, arrested and banned for making anti-white statements, have had surprising support from middle-aged blacks." He did not refer to Biko, SASO or BPC but concentrated on Buthelezi again. "After him will come angrier men," said Lewis. "Already he is regarded by some urban blacks as too soft." The point is raised but not pursued.

The apparent indifference to Biko, SASO and BPC was shared by white South African liberals, particularly writers Alan Paton and Nadine Gordimer, who had, it seems, almost annual access to the Times in the period studied. During the Soweto troubles in June 1976, for example, Gordimer reacted in the Times to the South African government's charge that SASO and BPC had stimulated the riots: "Perhaps, indeed, the sometimes bitter separationist black consciousness philosophy has attracted some schoolchildren." So much for Biko's influence by 1976. Gordimer wrote instead of Buthelezi, "the only prestigious black available who can be said to have a following larger than local or tribal."

On June 25 Times correspondent Michael Kaufman wrote that "what little analysis of the Soweto troubles that has emerged here has come from white liberals, who readily admit that they have little contact with the blacks of the townships, or particularly with the younger and apparently more militant generation of black students whose protest fanned the disorders." Alan Paton confirmed this judgment in his analysis of the riots for the Times on June 24: "I am not writing for all the people of South Africa. I am writing for its white people. White people

cannot write for black people any more."

Some black South African writers have long disputed their white compatriots' ability to do so. Acknowledging Paton's "generosity of spirit, his courageous plea for racial justice, and all those qualities which have earned him the undying respect of many Africans," Lewis Nkosi had nevertheless expressed in 1965 the contempt of young urban blacks for Paton's hero in Cry, The Beloved Country:

> We thought we discerned in Stephen Kumalo's naivete and simple-minded goodwill, white South Africa's subconscious desire to survive the blind tragedy which was bound to engulf the country sooner or later; for if the African...was as fundamentally good and forgiving as Stephen Kumalo was conceived to be, then the white South Africans might yet escape the immense penalty which they would be required to pay.[12]

Behind this contempt, Nkosi wrote, was "mutual antipathy" and "mutual denigration" between the younger and older generation of South African blacks in the 1950s. The younger generation, said Nkosi, would not forgive "the indecent readiness with which our immediate elders were prepared to believe that after this history of war and pillage white people meant well by us, and that given time they would soon accord us equal say in the running of the country's affairs."[13] A similar division can be seen in the barely reported tension between Biko and Buthelezi in the 1970s -- and a similar subconscious desire, perhaps, among white liberals for the "classic moderate" Buthelezi to prevail.

Clearly the South African government's exclusion of permanent Times correspondents from 1966 to 1976 and Biko's almost continuous restriction, banning or detention from 1973 made it difficult to report and assess his significance. Yet, despite the reporting of a stirring black consciousness and of occasional items about SASO, assertions after his death of Biko's stature and significance had a startling suddenness.

Biko, SASO, BPC, and the Washington Post

Like the Times, the Post seems to have carried only one article on Biko before his death. One September 27, 1976, the Post printed excerpts from a eulogy of Biko

by his friend Donald Woods. In all his travels in South Africa, the United States, Canada, Britain, Germany, France, Italy, and Israel, said Woods, "I have not met...a man as gifted with intellect, personality, and human understanding as the same Steven Biko." Woods' opinion was that after Nelson Mandela and Robert Sobukwe, "Biko is the leader most highly regarded by the more politically aware urban blacks -- especially the youth." Although a moving tribute to Biko's personal qualities as a man and potential prime minister of South Africa, Woods' comments by no means helped the reader understand why Biko was so highly regarded by urban blacks nor what kind of South Africa Biko hoped to bring about and perhaps govern. The Post itself did not fill the gap, nor had it prepared readers between 1972 (the year when an index to the paper was available) and 1976 for this apparently extraordinary man and his political organizations.

The Post had printed this incomprehensible Reuters report on May 24, 1972:

> Students at South African universities will boycott lectures starting June 1 in support of demands for rights and free speech, Temba Sono, president of the South African Students' Organization, said today.

Students at all universities, white and black? Was SASO a white or black student organization? Were the lectures in support of demands for rights and free speech or was the boycott? On March 4, 1973, the Post ran an Agence France-Presse report that the "entire leadership of the militant black South African Students' Organization has been prohibited from any political activity," that "eight 'banning' orders have been issued prohibiting any political activities by the student leaders." From 1973 to the Soweto troubles, the Post, like the Times, concentrated in its coverage of black politics on Buthelezi. Whatever influence Biko, SASO, and BPC were exerting was not reported.

The Post's most insightful reporting on South Africa in the 1970s was by Jim Hoagland in a series in June-July 1970 and another, "Black Power Vs. White Power: South Africa," in January 1977. No doubt the black consciousness movement

and its founders were too recent and unobtrusive in mid 1970 for discussion, although Hoagland did write of Biko and SASO in South Africa: Civilizations in Conflict, the book he developed out of his 1970 series. In its final pages, he wrote in 1972:

> The voice of the future comes from Africans like Steven Biko, a young medical student. As leader of the South African Students' Organization, an all-black group that had been recently set up, Biko delivered a remarkable speech...in January 1971. His cool and analytical view of young black South Africa's response to the various forms of white domination is worth considering in some detail for its implications on the coming two decades.[14]

In the speech, Biko disdained white liberals and their advocacy of integration as a way of opposing apartheid: "Not only did they /all whites/ kick the Native but they also told him how to respond to the kick," Biko said. "With painful slowness he is now beginning to show signs that it is his right and duty to respond to the kick in the way he sees fit."[15]

Curiously, despite his prescience about the future implications of Biko's analysis, Hoagland did not refer to Biko in his 1977 series. In his first article, on January 9, Hoagland wrote of the "stirring black awareness" he had observed in 1970 this way: "For many blacks in South Africa psychological revolution is already under way, dramatically transforming the once servile and politically dormant black majority that silently acquiesced to the walls of apartheid around black aspirations." In the third article of his Post series, appropriately headed, "Black Power in South Africa: Anonymous Youth Movement," Hoagland did not mention Biko, SASO, or BPC. "Black Power, South Africa-style," he said

> is still a tentative, angry and young experience....They are actively struggling with the white Government for the allegiance of their elders by preaching a still-developing political philosophy of Black Consciousness, a racial pride and renunciation of white control.

Hoagland reported that nine leaders of the movement had been jailed in December 1976 for five to ten years and others had been banned from speaking to reporters on threat of jail. Whether they, and particularly Biko, were responsible for the dramatic transformation Hoagland had observed, he does not say. These persons and their organizations remained anonymous, but Hoagland reported on January 12 that Gatsha Buthelezi was "emphasizing even more his clear commitment to black consciousness and eventual black rebellion." Was Buthelezi another Biko convert, then? Because of Biko's anonymity in the Post, one wonders how he came to be "internationally known" and to have an "international reputation" as the Post asserted after his death. It seems doubtful that, at least for readers of the Post, the excerpts from Woods' eulogy to Biko could have contributed significantly to securing the reputation and renown for him.

DISCUSSION

This case study tends to confirm the observations of Kenneth Grundy and Bernard Cohen on newspapers' lack of perspective and interpretation, on correspondents' dealing with political discontinuities, and on press coverage's anchorage in the immediate present. Times and Post coverage by no means provided readers with adequate understanding of Biko, SASO, and BPC, nor substantiated assertions of their stature and significance. Neither paper adequately reviewed Biko's life nor resisted labelling him without explanation as a moderate advocate of evolutionary change.

Reporters' Difficulties

In telephone interviews and correspondence (March-April 1978), reporters tended to accept these conclusions, but argued that conclusions drawn from content analysis alone do not convey the difficulties that reporters on general circulation newspapers have

(a) in reporting foreign events within severe time and space limitations to

readers who know little about any given foreign situation, and

(b) in reporting about a movement and its leaders when they are banned, detained or arrested and when American reporters are expelled or permitted only short visits to the country.

At the Times, Anthony Lewis (John Burns was in South Africa, Michael Kaufman in Kenya) said that his visit to South Africa in 1975 was so short that, although he knew of Biko, he did not have time to meet him. Lewis said he had based his September 15, 1977, assessment of Biko on what he had heard about Biko in South Africa from persons who knew him, on Burns' reports, and on the evaluation of Sen. Dick Clark, who had met Biko. Lewis conceded that perhaps he should have defined "moderate" more precisely, but rejected the interpretation that his accounts of Buthelezi in 1975 and Biko in 1977 conveyed that the two men were politically interchangeable. Such comparisons across time, he said, were inappropriate. He pointed out that his September 15 column was intended anyway less to evaluate Biko than to comment on the manner and meaning of his death in the context of the South African apartheid system.

At the Post, Jay Ross said that perhaps Biko had emerged greater in death than in life. Nevertheless, he said, his assertion that Biko was "internationally known" was justified. Persons who paid serious attention to South Africa, as opposed to the general reader who could not recognize the names of prominent world figures, however often reported, knew of Biko, Ross said. Jim Hoagland agreed. A reader of the Times and the Post over the years, Hoagland said, would have known of Biko, and he referred particularly to Burns' interview in the Times and Woods' eulogy in the Post. Hoagland could not recall whether he had discussed Biko in his 1970 series (he had not), but noted his discussion in the final chapter of his book. He said he could not meet with Biko and other SASO leaders in 1976 because they were jailed or banned, so he had not discussed them specifically in his 1977

series.

The almost continuous restriction of SASO and BPC leaders from 1973 clearly was a problem for reporters.[16] But Biko's limited accessibility then raises the question: How did he manage during those years to exert the profound influence on all blacks ... on young urban blacks that American journalists attributed to him? The isolation of Biko and other SASO and BPC leaders and the restrictions on American journalists help explain the scattered, unconnected news items that cropped up in the Times and Post from 1970. But it is a distinction of these papers that, in spite of the difficulties, they place reporters abroad and send others such as Marvine Howe, Charles Mohr, Anthony Lewis, and Jim Hoagland to research and write in-depth series.

Journalist-Scholar Relationships

These series cannot be read without developing an awareness of the stirring black consciousness in South Africa in the 1970s. Yet a vagueness pervades discussion of the role of SASO and particularly BPC that suggests reporters should have taken advantage of the expertise of American scholars of black politics in South Africa. In an analysis of the press' influence on American foreign policy published in 1967, James Reston of the Times wrote that

> ...it may be that news and analysis of news in a democracy are too serious to be left to newspapermen. The United States has been deeply involved in world affairs now for two generations. We have developed in the process a very large company of men and women in the universities, the foundations, international business, communications, and the government, who are well informed on international questions, some of them better informed on many subjects than any other people in the world. Unfortunately, not enough of these men and women are sharing with their fellow countrymen a great deal of what they know.[17]

Perhaps American scholars should be more aggressive in sharing what they know. Surely they are a resource journalists should tap more than they seem to do, at least in covering South Africa. By their nature, the reporting and analysis of

journalists, even of the most energetic, studious and specialized, tends to be impressionistic. Typically, journalists must cover too many areas too haphazardly to know any thoroughly. They haven't the leisure for the systematic, rigorous research of scholars, some of whom in this country have been studying the black consciousness movement as part of the context of black politics in South Africa for years.

Although analysis of the reporting suggested the contrary, Lewis said that he and Times editorial writers dealing with Africa regularly talk with scholars. Lewis added:

> But I guess we just did not have, after Lelyveld, any correspondent sufficiently tuned in to South Africa to consult specialists in this country regularly. Or, more fairly, I should say that those most interested (such as the men who made the occasional visits) were stationed at some distance from these scholars -- though they doubtless saw many people concerned with South Africa, including exiles.[18]

Hoagland said that time and travel problems prevented his consulting American scholars immediately before his two trips to South Africa, but he did not disdain scholarship. He noted, for example, that at the time of my call in March 1978, he was reading the galleys of a scholarly work on the black power movement in South Africa. He indicated, however, that the relationship between journalists and scholars studying South Africa was complex and worth exploration. He wrote:

> I think some of the working press feel that scholars writing on Africa tend to be for more 'engage' politically with individual black or white politicians, theories and movements than journalists can afford to be, and indeed more than scholars in many other areas are.[19]

The explanations of Lewis and Hoagland clarify reporters' difficulties and suggest problems in journalist-scholar relationships that should inform criticism of American press coverage of Biko's life. They by no means explain the failure of Times and Post reporters and editorial writers to substantiate assertions of Biko's stature and significance after his death. Space and time difficulties and

reservations about politically engage scholars do not seem persuasive barriers to informed analysis of Biko's influence and achievement (political reporters, who spend much of their professional life talking with politically engage sources, usually pride themselves on their ability to distinguish objective fact from subjective interpretation). Because reporters had had so much difficulty reporting on Biko's life, they could surely have benefitted from the knowledge and research of American scholars. Information on Biko and the black consciousness movement in scholars' possession was invaluable for this study.[20] It brought out the significant, sometimes bitter differences between Buthelezi and Biko that the news and analysis in the Times and Post had blurred, and suggested other flaws in coverage that were especially troubling.

Biko moved within a year in the Times and Post from a radical to a moderate, the latter bland term of approval signifying little more, it seems, than a commitment to nonviolent change in South Africa. Yet in asserting simultaneously Biko's considerable influence on young urban blacks, journalists left unexamined the nature of that influence on the violent behavior of young blacks in the 1976 and 1977 Soweto disturbances. If Biko was a moderate and responsible voice for peaceful, evolutionary change who had particular influence on young urban blacks, at what point did his influence cease? When the first youngster picked up a rock in Soweto? One senses in Biko's own writings and speeches that that is a question he would not have ducked.

In their tributes to Biko's moderate, responsible influence for change, American journalists and officials did not mention Biko's strong disagreement with U.S. policy toward South Africa. Again one senses in Biko's work that he would have resented this elision of critical differences. That is part of the puzzle of the coverage by the Times and the Post. Little though they reported of Biko

during his life, they reported enough to suggest a defiantly intelligent and courageous man. Yet in death, his incisive analysis of South Africa and of U.S. policy toward South Africa was blunted. American journalists' and officials' repeated references to Biko as "soft-spoken," "moderate," and "responsible" indicate a preoccupation with style rather than content that deflected attention from what Jim Hoagland described in 1972 as Biko's "cool and analytical view of young black South Africa's response to the various forms of white domination." A comment after Biko's death by outspoken anti-apartheid editor Donald Woods suggests how style and content were distinguished in Biko's analysis of South Africa:

> While Steve was alive, I kept hoping that the situation in South Africa could be sorted out by logic. I never was and am not now in complete agreement with everything Steve stood for -- I was nowhere near as radical as he -- but he was my friend.[21]

Anyone struck that American journalists' view of Biko did not fully mesh with his philosophy and policies may recall Lewis Nkosi's perception of how Alan Paton's Stephen Kumalo reflected white South Africans' subconscious desire to see blacks as "good and forgiving." In their insistence on Biko's being "moderate" and "responsible," American journalists seem to have softened Biko in similar fashion, leaving the uneasy and perhaps unjustified impression that they had exploited Biko's death as a means for registering their own abhorrence of apartheid. Or, and this possibility is much more troubling, that to justify the front page play and spirited editorial commentary on a South African black who was largely unknown to their mainly white readers, American journalists felt a need, perhaps subconscious, to stress that Biko was moderate and responsible without explaining the philosophy and policies that presumably informed those labels. The white American majority, after all, is not much more comfortable than the white South African minority with a cool and analytical view of blacks' response to the various forms of white

domination.

If these speculations about American journalists' post-mortem characterization of Steven Biko are accurate, then they have done a disservice to his life and the very essence of his philosophy. Finally, they have failed adequately to explain to some of the most informed and interested American readers the philosophy and policy of young black South Africans who seem certain to shape that troubled country's future and its relationships with the United States.

FOOTNOTES

1. Kenneth W. Grundy's review of Gwendolen M. Carter and Patrick O'Meara (eds.), Southern Africa in Crisis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977) is forthcoming in the American Political Science Review.
2. Bernard C. Cohen, The Press and Foreign Policy (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965), pp. 241, 242.
3. Ibid., p. 242.
4. Walter Lippmann, Public Opinion (New York: Free Press, 1956), p. 226.
5. Cohen, op. cit., p. 208.
6. To develop a sense of the immediate responses to Biko's death by American news media other than the New York Times and Washington Post, the September 14, 1977 issues of the Los Angeles Times, Chicago Tribune, and Christian Science Monitor and the September 26, 1977 issues of Time and Newsweek were consulted. The Times and Monitor carried by-lined reports by staff writers, the Tribune carried both the United Press International and Associated Press reports.
7. Cohen, op. cit., p. 140.
8. A New York Times Index reference to a story on September 19, 1976, cautions one about the index's reliability: "New York Times reporter John F. Burns relays comments made by detained photographer Steven Biko on what he would tell Kissinger if he had the opportunity." Biko never was a photographer nor did Burns ever so identify him.
9. Carter and O'Meara, op. cit., p. 127. This work is excellent background, a concise and insightful analysis of southern Africa's contemporary crisis.
10. For extensive excerpts from Biko's testimony, see Donald Woods, Biko (New York: Paddington Press, Ltd., 1978), pp. 114 - 158.
11. The Washington Post, August 26, 1977.
12. Lewis Nkosi, Home and Exile (London: Longmans, 1965), p. 5.
13. Ibid., p. 3.
14. Jim Hoagland, South Africa: Civilizations in Conflict (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972), p. 385.
15. Ibid., pp. 385 - 386.
16. For example, in reporting his interview with Biko, published in the Times on September 19, 1976, John Burns noted that he had spoken to Biko while Biko was under a banning order and so could not give interviews for publication. After Biko's death John Platter, UPI South African bureau manager, released an interview with Biko that he had taped in early 1977. Platter wrote (Bloomington Herald-Telephone, October 27, 1977): "Biko agreed to meet me only if his comments were off the record. But I taped the three-hour interview, interrupted briefly by two plainclothes policemen keeping tabs on Biko."
17. James Reston, The Artillery of the Press: Its Influence on American Foreign Policy (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), pp. 87 - 88.

18. Letter to the author, April 17, 1978.

19. Letter to the author, April, 1978.

20. The materials on Steven Biko of Prof. Gwendolen Carter of Indiana University, an American authority on black politics in South Africa, included recent SASO newsletters and Biko's testimony in the 1976 trial. Prof. Carter also directed me to the work of Gail Gerhart, whose book, Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology (University of California Press) is in press.

21. "Biko's Friemd," The New Yorker, May 29, 1978, p. 22.